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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

## INFORMATION REPORT

COUNTRY Bulgaria

SUBJECT Bulgarian Labor Battalions

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Labor Battalion

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50X1-HUM

-2-

There was no physical training exercise in the morning nor were there any other duties as in ordinary military barracks.

all companies were full strength and some men were needed for digging.

#### Working Conditions

The HQ was located in a small village house consisting of three rooms and a cellar. The rooms contained offices and the cellar a store. the company chief (Starshina) Minder

a billet situated in a four-room peasant house. The family consisted of four persons.

the furniture consisted of plain sleeping bunks made of planks covered with straw and covered with canvas from bags.

2. Around 7 pm when groups of trudovaks returned from work they gathered near the building of the HQ and supper was brought in. There were no tables or benches. At 9:30 pm there was evening roll call. The company consisted of about 65 men, who stood in a row while an NCO read the list and checked the presence. After roll call the trudovaks proceeded to their billets.
3. The next day at 6 am there was reveille, after which the men got up, washed, and gathered in front of the HQ building.
4. A kind of colored water, slightly sweetened, was served as tea and a piece of bread (85g grams per man) and a piece of cheese (about 40 grams) was distributed. Then the soldiers formed groups composed of 200 men under the charge of group leaders (Otgovernnik). The Starshina gave the daily work assignment to each group leader. Then the groups proceeded to the store where they were given tools.

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50X1-HUM

-3-

5. The place of work was some one or one and one-half km away. [redacted]

6. The tools were in very bad condition. Pick handles were too short, badly fixed, blunt and often broken. Shovels [redacted] were made of roughly-made iron plates about one cm thick, fixed to two m long handles, coarsely shaped. Of about 50 shovels only five were of any use and there was a real struggle between the men for them. The lifting of such a heavy shovel (about 10 kg) was an effort and digging was exhaustive work. There was no carpenter or blacksmith who could repair these tools.

50X1-HUM  
50X1-HUM

7. The men complained to the CO, pointing out that an enormous amount of their energy was being wasted. The CO comforted the men by promising them that soon they would finish their work and then they would be transferred to another place where everything would be at hand.

8. At the work site [redacted] gun emplacements combined with shelters and ammunition dumps. Each artillery emplacement consisted of a concrete plate in the form of a circle two m in diameter, constructed below ground level. In both directions from this concrete emplacement two shelters built of bricks and covered by brick vaults were constructed. The length of them was three m. At the entrance the height was 1.60 m and at the other end the height reached 1.80 and 2.20 respectively. The width of shelters was one m. In one of them there were three niches where the soldiers could take cover during the firing of the gun.

50X1-HUM

9. At the other end of the shelter there was a two by one meter artillery shell dump. At the ends of both shelters were small holes, connected with concrete pipes for diverting rainwater if it entered the shelter area.

10. The work the trudovaki had to do consisted of covering the shelters with soil and camouflaging them, while one of the three groups of the company was employed in building the remaining part of the shelters. After the shelters had been covered with soil, turf had to be brought in and planted so as to make the whole site blend with the surrounding area.

11. The fixed norm for one group consisted of covering with soil and camouflaging one site within two work days. However, the CO of my company, Lieut Hristo Hristov wanted to get a quick promotion and ordered the group to accomplish the norm in one day instead of two.

12. The group leader (Otgovernik) Stefan, who hailed from the Sofia region, a driver by profession, was transferred to labor battalions from the regular army. He told his men in advance that he didn't intend to drive them to work, but if they would not work hard enough, the CO would come the next day and order them to work as long as necessary to finish their task. The men, therefore, worked like devils.

13. About 12:20 pm the midday meal was brought in. There was tomato soup with paprika, but without any fat or meat. In addition each of the men got three to four spring onions. [redacted]

50X1-HUM

14 [redacted]

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50X1-HUM

-4-

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another artillery emplacement. The conditions of work were far worse than the previous day because the soil was full of stones. About midday the company CO arrived and surveyed the work until night. [redacted] under the officer's eyes one has to give the impression that one worked very hard indeed, but one could do everything possible to work effectively as little as possible. The whole group worked thus with apparent energy and speed; nobody even murmured a word. But when 7 pm came much remained to be done. At 7:30 the CO ordered the group to stop work, although they finished only about two thirds of the norm. However, even this was a feat, considering the circumstances.

50X1-HUM

50X1-HUM

50X1-HUM

7. "The political information period lasted about 15 minutes, between breakfast and going to work. The CO of the company read from the daily 'Rabotnichesko Delo' the survey of the international situation and then he spoke about it.

50X1-HUM

8. "The following day was free from work. It was the feast of Saint Cyril and Metody (May 24) and there was a celebration (Sobor) in the village.

9. "The trudovak company with which I worked consisted of [redacted] soldiers sent from the regular army. Five or six had old rifles of the 'Mannlicher' type, formerly used in the army and they performed guard duties. All others had no arms of any kind and there was no drill or training exercises.

50X1-HUM

50X1-HUM

10. "The trudovaks were very depressed, desperate, without joy of life. They all complained because of heavy work, inadequate food and long service. Many were afraid that they would not be able to complete their service. They hated their CO wholeheartedly and at the same time they were afraid of him.

11. "They worked in such a way as to save themselves from complete exhaustion and this was their kind of self-defense. The ration of bread was so small that it was a usual thing that a trudovak eat up his ration at breakfast and at the 10 am short break, and thus he had nothing for his lunch and supper. He was still hungry.

12. "Every 10 days they received a ration of soap, about 200 grams per man. They sold this soap to peasants for bread. The majority of the soldiers in the company were poor men who never received any food parcels from home. In addition, they had fled from distant parts of the country and therefore nobody visited them.

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-5-

15. "There were no informers among the soliders. It didn't pay anyway. Apart from that everybody had a hard time and tried to manage somehow. There were rumors that in one of the cellars a solitary confinement cell (Kartser) was arranged for the offenders [redacted]
16. "Relations between trudovaks and civilians were good. [redacted] In the village, there was a post (Zastava) of Frontier Guards, and the relations between trudovaks and Frontier Guard soldiers were quite normal, (contrary to previous experiences, where they had been very strained).
17. [redacted] Sobor', the celebration in the village. [redacted] quite a large number of people gathered, but [redacted] in comparison to a few years before, their number was very small. There was no gaiety as there used to be and everybody looked lost in thought and depressed. The same was true about the youth, formerly full of care-free gaiety."

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